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The actors Ichikawa Danzo, as Amakawaya Gihei, and Otani Tokuji, as Igo, in a production of the play *Kanadehon Chushingura*, at the Morita-za, Edo, in 1781. By Shunsho (1726-1792). Henry Adams Collection.

The play *Chushingura* is well-known to Occidentals under the name of "The Loyal League" or "The Forty-Seven Ronin." In the tenth act of this drama, Gihei, a mere trader, gives proof of a fidelity unsurpassed even by the most loyal *samurai*. The print depicts the scene in which a witless boy-servant, Igo, half awake, his quilt over his shoulders, goes toward the entrance in answer to a knock, while Gihei anxiously watches him from the rear.

### Recent Accessions of Japanese Prints

IT would be futile to seek a complete list of extant prints by any one of the many artists of the Ukiyo-é School, for even those who are in a position to examine the largest number are constantly "discovering" works hitherto unknown. Though probably unequalled in wealth elsewhere, the collection of Japanese prints in this Museum still lacks some well-known works, and many series are as yet incomplete.\* It is gratifying, however, to state that through gifts and purchases these gaps are gradually being filled. Among the recent accessions are those which are illustrated and described herewith.

\*The Museum possesses, for example, approximately 570 prints by Shunsho, 100 by Buncho, 350 by Kiyonaga, and 550 by Utamaro, exclusive of duplicates—a collection extraordinary even in point of size alone.

The three prints of actors belong to the variety of Ukiyo-é prints called *nigao-é*, or "likeness-pictures," a term generally applied to delineations of actors in characteristic rôles. The important *nigao-é* prints were produced largely during the Meiwa-Kwansei period (1764-1800), the golden age in the history of the Japanese color-print; and it was in the early part of this period that Shunsho first gave expression and individuality to pictures of stage celebrities, his predecessors having been concerned merely with types.

Despite the fact that it was an administration of militarists, the peaceful Tokugawa, or Edo, epoch (1603-1867) was essentially the period of the bourgeoisie. With the cessation of bloodshed and turmoil the populace of Edo (now Tokyo), the seat of the *Shogun* government, was left free to develop and assert a civilization of its own, and by



The actor Arashi Sangoro as Takebé Genzo in a production of the play *Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami*, at the Ichimura-za, Edo, in 1772. By Buncho (worked 1765-1780) Publisher: Maruya. Bigelow Collection.

Shihei, having accomplished the banishment of Michizané on a false charge, now determines to rid himself of the latter's young heir, Kwanshusai, who is being hidden and reared by Genzo, formerly in the service of Michizané, but now the master of a village school. The day comes when Shihei's messengers arrive to demand the head of the boy. Among them is Matsuo, who was indebted to Michizané for kindness. Genzo produces the head of a boy whose mother had brought him to the school for instruction earlier in the day. Matsuo pronounces the head to be the right one. Later it is revealed that the new pupil was Matsuo's own son whom he and his wife had planned to sacrifice for Kwanshusai. The print depicts Genzo, unaware of Matsuo's premeditated plan, ready to unsheathe his sword should the latter decline to accept the substitute head.

the middle of the eighteenth century had become preoccupied with pleasure-seeking. Even the men of the exalted military class became plebeian in taste, though compelled by restricted means to be more conservative than the wealthier commoners. Of all the frivolous amusements with which they sought to quench their insatiable thirst, the play-houses alone furnished joy to one and all. The enthusiastic audiences, less interested in the dramas themselves, focussed their attention upon the acting of the chief performers, with the result that the latter became the idols of the public. Not only did these players set the fashions for the plebeians, but their influence was felt even among the

aristocrats. Many varieties of merchandise of the day bore the names of actors. It was but natural that the patrons of the theatres should welcome portraits of favorite players, especially in celebrated rôles. Students of Japanese prints realize that the art of the Ukiyo-é owes its development in no small measure to the growth of the theatres. In fact, among the products of the Ukiyo-é School theatrical themes predominate, and it may safely be said that, were the many existing products of this school arranged in sequence of date, practically the complete progress of the *kabuki*, the popular histrionic art of Japan for three centuries, would be illustrated. The *kabuki* made its *début* in the



A tea-house at Ryogoku, Edo: one of the series, "Views of Ten Tea-houses." By Kiyonaga (1752-1815). Publisher: Eijudo. Purchased from the Francis Gardner Curtis Fund.

Two young women about to enter a boat near a tea-house on the bank of the Sumida River.

beginning of the seventeenth century, and in its early stages was merely a series of dramatic dances, whose chief performers were troupes of women; whence it came to be known as *onna* (female) *kabuki*. Later, when performed by companies of young men, it received the name *wakashu* (youth) *kabuki*, both varieties surviving but a short time on account of their evil influence upon the morals of the populace. In the middle of the seventeenth century the *wakashu kabuki* was transformed into the *yaro* (low fellow) *kabuki*, which gave opportunity to older men also to follow stage careers.\*

\* Both the *onna kabuki* and the *wakashu kabuki* relied upon the youthful and pleasing physique of their players to attract the public, the *wakashu* surviving some years after the suppression of the *onna*. The order of the magistrate in 1652, compelling the *wakashu* actors to shave their forelocks like all adult males, was issued with the direct intent of marring their handsome appearance. Thus the popular name "*yaro*" was adopted. It may be added that the mandate forbidding the appearance of women upon the stage remained in effect until the end of the nineteenth century, female roles being always impersonated by males, as evidenced in the print herewith by Shunko, which likewise illustrates the practice among actors in female roles of covering the shaven spot on the head with a silk cloth.

The effect of this innovation was to stimulate actors to greater efforts, for they now had to win public favor by creditable acting, not solely by personal charms; and it marked a sudden step forward in the development of the *kabuki* proper (serious dramatic performances), the theatre soon becoming an established institution in the three large cities of Edo, Kyoto and Osaka, especially in the first-named. The old masters of the Ukiyo-é School pictured the *kabuki* players in groups or singly, with few or no accessories; and they also depicted exteriors and interiors of playhouses. An examination of the *yakusha-é* (actor-prints) by designers like Kiyonobu and Masanobu, of the so-called primitive period, reveals very slight variations in the faces of all the subjects — a peculiarity of Oriental painters, who were concerned only with general types, as, for example, types for old age and youth, evil and good, high and low. Herein lies the



A Tea-house at Yagenbori, Edo: one of the series, "Views of Ten Tea-houses." By Kiyonaga (1752-1815). Publisher: Eijudo. Bigelow Collection.

A maid of the Tea-house Hatsutaka has attracted the attention of a young woman who is passing, followed by her man-servant.

distinction between the older *yakusha-é* and the *nigao-é*, the one concerned only with prescribed types, the other attempting to portray individual characteristics. The pioneers and exponents of the latter style — like Shunsho, Buncho and Shunko — had many followers, some of whom carried the idea of character-representation much farther than their masters, even to the point of exaggeration, as, for instance, Sharaku. Later, during the nineteenth century, the *nigao-é* in the hands of the Utagawa artists degenerated hopelessly. It may be remarked that a series of even the finest of the *nigao-é* evoke a sense of monotony, attributable in the main to the frequent repetition of a limited repertoire, the nature of the plays to be performed in each theatrical season being rigidly prescribed, and a given rôle in many cases being hereditary in a family of actors. Stereotyped attitudes and gestures were the inevitable result.

The great theatres were the pride of the populace of Edo; so were the prosperous gay quarters which, like the former, supplied the Ukiyo-é artists with an abundance of pictorial motives. Besides these unfailing sources of inspiration, any subject which reflected the tastes of the masses was chosen for these far-famed "broideries of the Eastern capital" as the names *Edo-é* and *Azuma-nishiki-é* signify.\* During the Meiwa-Kwansei period, innumerable *mizu-jaya*, or *chamisé*, sprang up in temple grounds and the principal thoroughfares, their presence testifying to the leisurely existence of the dwellers in old Edo. A *mizu-jaya*, a place for rest and rendezvous, was ordinarily an unpretentious structure, furnished with but a few benches, in which tea and other light refreshments were

\* "Azuma," meaning "East," refers to Edo, which was often spoken of as the Eastern capital, because it lay in the direction of the east from Kyoto, the Imperial capital. "Nishiki-é" may be translated "beautiful pictures," for it signifies "beautiful as brocade."



Lovers. By Utamaro (1754-1806). Publisher: Moriya.  
Gift of Captain John C. Phillips.

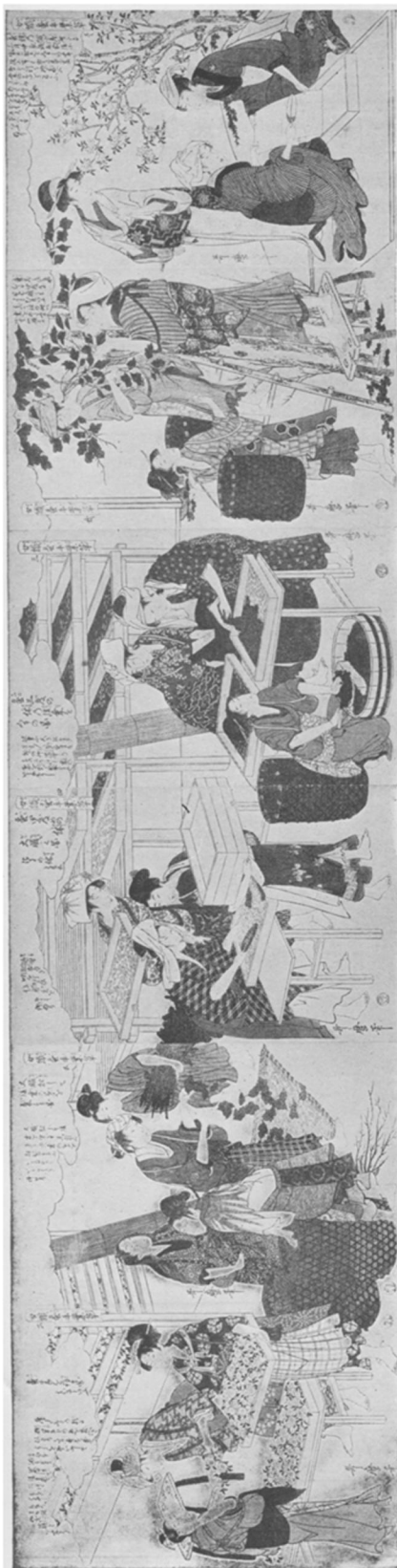
A young man returning the glance of a maiden who looks at him through his gauzy *haori*.

served. Some of these tea-houses became famous for their beautiful maids, and attracted crowds from far and near,—a popularity which the painters of the genre were active in furthering, as seen in the prints by Kiyonaga reproduced herewith.

The unoccupied mind invariably wanders to mundane pleasures, and popular literature and plays usually contribute their share to lure the thoughtless into a fool's paradise. The Edo period was rich in tales of elopement and double suicide. Many prints by Utamaro and others depicting sentimental episodes—man bewitched or woman enamoured—are all-significant of the times. The possession of a knowledge of feminine physiognomy, by the way, was considered essential to those who delighted in amorous experiences; and this study is frequently dealt with by Utamaro, though of course whimsically.

Notwithstanding that it was characteristic of the Ukiyo-é artists to draw their themes from con-

porary life, they oftentimes resorted to history or legend. In this field, it must be admitted, they were generally least competent; for to these unlettered wielders of the brush accurate information, archæological or historical, was inaccessible. In the so-called *mitate-é*, "parody pictures," however, in which historic episodes and popular legends were perverted, they exhibited their customary originality and cleverness. The *mitate-é* are not necessarily caricatures, but entirely new interpretations of old and familiar plots. A certain print, for example, pictures a gay young horseman drawing rein on a bridge and about to hand a love letter to a maiden who is pictured below in the attitude of passing a fan to him—a parody on the well-known story of Chang Liang. Chang Liang (the maiden) was a brave Chinese warrior who is said to have been presented with a scroll of military tactics (the love letter) by an aged legendary being named Huang Shih Kang (the horseman), as a reward for his



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<sup>11</sup> Feminine Handiwork: Sericulture and Weaving. A set of twelve sheets. By Utamaro (1754-1806). Publisher: Tsuruya. Bigelow Collection.

Though the design is continuous throughout the set, each sheet, proceeding from right to left in characteristic Oriental fashion, presents a stage in the silk industry. The main points contained in the inscriptions are as follows: (1) During March the eggs which have been deposited on papers are hatched and the larvae transferred to wooden trays; and now begins the feeding upon finely chopped mulberry leaves. (2) Silk worms take rest—the moulting period—four times, when special care is required in feeding. (3) After the third rest, the silkworms having steadily developed, it is difficult to chop enough mulberry leaves for them. (4) While the silkworms take the fourth or “great rest,” preparations for their awakening are in order. (5) At the end of the “great rest” their appetites increase and there is not sufficient time in which to pick the leaves properly. (6) The cocoons are spun on twigs provided for the silkworms and are removed therefrom four or five days later. (7) The well-

formed cocoons are selected and are hung up by strings, and when the moths emerge, male and female in pairs are placed upon the paper for obtaining the eggs. (8) The silkworms which have finished spinning fly away in the form of butterflies. (9) The fresh cocoons are first treated in salt, then removed to a pan in which they are boiled as the reeling-off goes on. (10) As in the case of thread, in preparing the sheets of floss-silk, the cocoons are divided according to quality before shaping them into squares. (11) In the mythological period Kagutsuchi and Haniyama-hime brought forth a child named Wakamushi, upon whose head, it is said, grew silkworms and mulberry trees. The consort of the Emperor Yuryaku (A. D. 457-479) herself reared silkworms, while in China the Empress Hsi Ling, wife of Huang Ti, (about 2700 B. C.) first introduced their culture.

No. 12 contains no inscription. Each sheet bears a title (within a border), a number and the name of the artist.





A woman combing her hair: one of the series, "Ten Types of Feminine Physiognomy." By Utamaro (1754-1806). Publisher: Yamaguchi. Gift of Captain John C. Phillips.

The inscription referring to this type of woman reads: "Scrupulous in conduct and thoughtful in all things—a desirable physiognomy; though ardent in nature, not easily won."

courtesy in rescuing the latter's shoe (the fan) from the stream. The term *yatsushi-é*, literally "abridged pictures," was sometimes used to designate similar fanciful representations. The celebrated set of twelve sheets on "Sericulture," by Utamaro, may be assigned to this group; for, instead of picturing country women, the artist has drawn women of the city, youthful and charming, thus catering to the preferences of his public. It is interesting to note that in this work Utamaro "borrowed," as did Shunsho and Shigemasa,\* from a series of pictures of sericulture which appear in the book entitled "Ehon Jikishiho," by Morikuni, published in 1744. A comparison of the works shows that Utamaro followed Morikuni in general conception more closely than did Shunsho and Shigemasa, often, however, in many compositions substituting interiors for exteriors; yet in degree of idealization Utamaro went much farther. All three artists appropriated the legends which accompany each scene in the "Ehon Jikishiho." There is, however, one serious and noticeable misinterpretation by Utamaro of a passage in the text. The inscription on the seventh sheet refers to tying cocoons from which the moths emerge. Utamaro innocently depicts two moths tied to the end of a string. This circumstance is but another reminder that the designers of prints belonged to the class of unlettered commoners, as did their admirers.

\*In the book entitled "*Ehon Takaro no Ita*," also known as "*Kaiko Yashinai gusa*," in which Shunsho and Shigemasa collaborated.

Wholly reconciled to the existing order of things—the strict caste system which barred the plebeians from access to the higher and nobler, though the members of the superior class were wont to mingle with them in their amusements—the populace enjoyed life to the full, until the term *Ukiyo* (literally "fleeting world," hence "impermanent existence") was fully realized in its paradoxical sense of "unmindful of the morrow." And, in the art of the Ukiyo-é as a whole, especially in prints, the only form of pictorial art within reach of rich and poor alike in those days, the æsthetic wants of the masses were satisfied, for in them were reflected their life and their ideals. Mindful only of the present and quite unaware of the artistic worth of these mirrors of their existence, neither artist nor public made any serious attempt to preserve them for posterity; and to this indifference we may in part attribute the gaps in every important collection.

K. T.



The actor Yamashita Mangiku, probably as Koman, in a performance of the play *Koi-nyobo Somewake Tazuma* at Kiri-za, Edo, in 1789. By Shunko (died in 1816). Henry Adams Collection.

Koman, once a popular *geisha* in a city, but now leading a miserable existence in the village of Seki on the highway called the Tokaido. Later, however, she becomes the second wife of a *samurai*.